STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE A7

THE WASHINGTON STAR (GREEN LINE)
27 June 1979

How to Maintain Might 'Secure From Attac

Decision on MX Set Up a New Hard Choice

By Vernon A. Guidry Jr.
Washington Star Staff Writer

Second of two articles.

In late May, President Carter sounded like a man who wanted to buy a new missile.

It was a little surprising. His administration was in the midst of an internal review on the issue and Carter had not before shown an appetite for expensive, menacing new military hardware. His biggest decision so far had been to kill the B-1 bomber.

But there were new pressures. His strategic arms pact with the Soviet Union faced real problems in the Senate.

And even while the treaty was being negotiated, estimates were being revised on the increasing threat Soviet missiles posed for their U.S. counterparts. That threat to U.S. land-based rockets and its impact on the ratifiction of the arms limitation treaty were the driving forces behind the debate over a new generation of U.S. weapons.

So a press conference May 29 found Carter talking about the need to maintain might equivalent to the Russians' and to maintain it "secure from attack."

LESS THAN A WEEK later, Carter began two days of National Security Council meetings with his top advisers to settle the issue. The partial decision the White House announced after those meetings calmed some fears on the right, brought sharp criticism from the left and set up the internal fight now going on within the administration on the future of U.S. missiles.

Before that partial decision was reached, the president's advisers had gone through a weeks-long process designed to hone the options that would be presented to Carter. There was a general consensus, but not unanimity. The central options previously had been narrowed to two.

First, there was the Air Force version of MX, for missile experimental. This 10-warhead weapon would be the largest missile permitted the United States under the new arms pact.

A decision for this missile would mean a decision for some form of land deployment designed to survive attack.

The chief candidate for a survivable "basing mode" was a system of trenches with protected hiding places. A couple of hundred missiles would be shuttled secretly among 8,000 to 9,000 potential hiding places.

THESE WERE THE elements of the first option. The second option was quite different.

It would have done nothing directly to counter the vulnerability of land-based missiles. Instead, it envisoned increasing the submarine force carrying strategic missiles and the bomber force carrying the new robot jet bombs called cruise missiles. Instead of the large MX, the Air Force would be given a land version of the Trident II submarine missile on Navy drawing boards.

This second option rested on the notion that if bombers and submarines were sufficiently increased, the Soviet Union would see little profit in attacking the still-vulnerable land missiles.

Carter decided at the second meeting, June 5, to go ahead with the Air Force-favored MX. The meetings had been held under the presumption that the land-based missiles would be preserved, if it could be done. "On the fifth of June, what Carter decided was, in effect, that it was do-able," says one official involved.

In retrospect, the other option seems to have had little support among Carter's advisers. Officials say only Frank Press, Carter's science adviser, and Stansfield Turner, CIA chief and recently retired admiral, favored pressing the Navy missile on the Air Force and choosing option two.

Indeed, one official says a consensus developed among most advisers involved that failure to chose a survivable land-based system would constitute a U.S. strategic defeat at the hands of the Russians.

AMONG OFFICIALS who strongly favored maintaining the land-based leg was presidential national security affairs adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

"Brzezinski has been carrying Defense's water on the big missile," claims one administration official. Another knowledgeable source says Defense Secretary Harold Brown did advocate maintaining land-based missiles, but did not crowd Carter on the issue of which basing system to adopt.

Even though Carter's decision to build the big missile means some form of survivable basing system will have to be developed, the question of precisely which kind to build is one of sharp controversy within his administration.

Knowledgeable officials say James T. McIntyre Jr., chief of the Office of Management and Budget, has challenged the estimates of Pentagon civilians on what their preferred method of missile basing will cost, and the amount of environmental protest it will stir.

In a memorandum to Carter, McIntyre reportedly said the cost of the favored system could reach $40 billion to $50 billion instead of the $30 billion to $35 billion estimated at the Pentagon.

THE ISSUES involved in determining the cost are far from being technicalities. When Carter spoke at the NSC meetings, his concerns were clear. Foremost was the question of arms control verification, and secondly, Carter was concerned about the environmental difficulties involved in building a survivable, verifiable system.

Verification long had been the chief question mark about any survivable land-based system. It was easy

CONTINUED